

~~SECRET NOFORN~~N10/EUR
28 October 1986JOCKEYING FOR POSITION IN THE EAST EUROPEAN LEADERSHIPS

The long-anticipated leadership successions in several East European countries are already under way, as signs of maneuvering and jockeying for position are growing in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. These pre-succession power plays, symptomatic of political systems lacking procedures for the orderly transfer of power, have already led to the semi-paralysis of the ruling elites; if they intensify, serious instability may result.

Hungary: Kadarism without Kadar?. The fragile state of Kadar's health, and his continued unwillingness to relinquish power, have given rise to feverish maneuvering among his potential successors.

- Two leading contenders -- Janos Berecz and Karoly Grosz -- were charged with alcoholism in a recent party document, reportedly designed to strengthen the positions of Istvan Horvath and Matyas Szuros, two other heirs presumptive.
- Kadar, meanwhile, [redacted] oppose Berecz, whom Moscow favors, and may transfer him away from his power base in the party secretariat.
- Other Hungarian leaders, fearful of being swept away in a Gorbachev-inspired purge of the old guard, are maneuvering in shifting coalitions to preserve their own positions into the post-Kadar era.

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All of this has important political consequences, both immediate and potential. Already Kadar has delegated many of the daily affairs of state to the Secretariat and his personal staff, tough decisions on economic and political reform are simply not made at all. Gorbachev's concern over the situation was demonstrated last June when he raised the succession issue directly with Kadar. Gorbachev was rebuffed then but may be inclined to intervene more forcefully should divisions deepen.



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- Some speculation has it that Husak will retain the ceremonial post of head of state but relinquish the party leadership.
- Other [redacted] forecast sweeping changes in the party presidium, with Strougal, Bilak and other holdovers from the post-1968 period leaving along with Husak.

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While it is difficult to separate wheat from chaff in this speculation, it is evident that the Soviet leadership is more deeply involved than we had thought in the succession maneuvering.

- One potential candidate -- Jan Fojtik -- was given a chilly reception in Moscow two weeks ago; another, Milos Jakes, was greeted much more warmly last week.
- A rumored Gorbachev visit to Prague has not yet materialized, but the mere existence of the rumor reveals the depth of uncertainty now prevailing in the Czechoslovak leadership. And if such a direct Soviet intervention were to occur, it would send shock waves through the other East European capitals.

Can we influence the outcomes? Clearly, our influence over succession processes in Eastern Europe is very limited, but we do have some leverage, particularly in Hungary and Romania. (There is probably nothing we could do to influence the Bulgarian and Czechoslovak successions.)

- In Hungary, for example, an active and imaginative US economic engagement of the top leadership might help create an atmosphere that encourages an economic reform course and, indirectly, strengthens the positions of reform-minded candidates.
- Similarly, Ceausescu's performance at the recent Warsaw Pact foreign ministers' meeting gives us an opportunity to demonstrate our support for Romanian independent-mindedness and encourage similar behavior under the next regime in Bucharest. And economic inducements could prove crucial once the post-Ceausescu era is upon us.

In short, we may not be able to buy the Hungarian and Romanian "elections," but we do have a vote.

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